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Message Text

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ACTION AID-31

INFO OCT-01 NEA-10 ISO-00 INR-07 IO-13 MED-02 NSAE-00
PA-01 DHA-05 CA-01 OES-07 USIA-06 PRS-01 CIAE-00
HEW-04 DODE-00 /089 W
----------041468 100148Z /62
R 091327Z SEP 77 CORRECTED COPY FOR MRN
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4751
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY CAIRO

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 DAMASCUS 5752

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y(MRN5752 VICE 05702 AS VALIDATED)

PASS AID FOR OFDA AND NE

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SWEL, SY
SUBJECT: CHOLERA IN SYRIA: U.S. ASSISTANCE

SUMMARY: RECENT EVENTS LEADING TO A REQUEST FOR ANTI-CHOLERA MEDICAL SUPPLIES AS USG EMERGENCY ASSITANCE THRUST US UNWITTINGLY TINO THE MIDDLE OF INTERNAL SYRIAN GOVERNMENT PERSONALITY AND IDEOLOGICAL BATTLES. OUR EFFORTS TO ARRNAGE DELIVERY OF MEDICAL SUPPLIES STIMULATED UTTERANCES OF DEEP-SEATED ANIMOSITY FROM A SENIOR SARG OFFICIAL IN THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND A THREE DAY DELAY IN OFFICIAL PERMISSION TO DELIVER EMERGENCY RELIEF OF MEDICAL COMMODITIES. THIS EPISODE IS A REMINDER OF SOME LONGSTANDING SYRIAN SENSTIVITIES AND THE VOLATILE ATTITUDES AND ATMOSPHERE IN WHICH WE ARE WORKING. END SUMMARY

1. WHEN THE SARG FINALLY DECIDED THAT THE NUMBER
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OF CASES AND SPREAD OF CHOLERA THROUGHOUT SYRIA WAS TRULY OF EPIDEMIC PROPORTIONS AND COULDN'T BE HANDLED WITHOUT INVOLVING THE PUBLIC IN MEASURES TO COMBAT THE DISEASE, THE SARG FORMED AN AD HOC CHOLERA COMMITTEE TO COORDINATE ALL GOVERNMENT ACTIONS. THE PRIME MINISTER APPOINTED THE MINISTER OF STATE FOR CABINET AFFIRS AS CHAIRMAN OF THE

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CHOLERA COMMITTEE, NOT THE MINISTER OF HEALTH AS
MIGHT HAVE BEEN EXPECTED.

2. ON AUGUST 31, DURING A CHOLERA COMMITTEE MEETING
WHICH HE ATTENDED, THE PRIME MINISTER INSTRUCTED THE
MINISTER OF HEALTH TO ASK FOR ASSISTANCE TO FIGHT
THE EPIDEMIC FROM IN PRECISE ORDER) "ARAB BROTHER
STATES, FRIENDLY NATIONS AND THE WHO." THE MINISTER
OF HEALTH CARRIED OUT THE PRIME MINISTER'S INSTRUCTION
AND REQUESTED MEDICAL SUPPLIES INTER ALIA FROM THE USG, THERE-
FOR PLACING THE U.S. IN THE CATEGORY OF A "FRIENDLY NATION."

3. ON THE BASIS OF AVAILABLE STATISTICS ON THE EPIDEMIC
AND IN RESPONSE TO THE MINISTER OF HEALTH'S
WRITTEN REQUEST, THE AMBASSADOR DETERMINED ON SEPTEMBER 1 THAT THE
SITUATION WAS SERIOUS AND U.S. DISASTER RELIEF ASSITANCE WAS
APROPRIATE, (REF A), THAT SAME EVENING HE SENT A LETTER TO THE
MINISTER OF HEALTH STATING THAT HE WAS USING HIS
$25,000 AUTHORITY TO PURCHASE REQUESTED MEDICAL
SUPPLIES FOR SYRIA. IN THAT LETTER, THE
AMBASSADOR ASKED THAT ARRANGEMENTS BE MADE TO
FACILITATE DELIVERY FROM BEIRUT. A COPY OF THE
AMBASSADOR'S LETTER WAS DELIVERED TO THE PRIME
MINISTER.

4. USAID PERSONNEL, IN THE MEANTIME, HAD (A)
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CONTACTED HEALTH MINISTRY OFFICIALS TO DETERMINE
SYRIA'S SUPPLY OF MEDICAL SUPPLIES AND WHAT SYRIA
EXPECTED TO RECEIVE FROM OTHER DONORS TO ASSESS THE
URGENCY OF THE NEED; AND (B) THROUGH A CHECK OF
NEARBY SOURCES, DETERMINED THAT THE REQUESTED IV
FLUIDS AND DRUGS WERE AVILABLE IN BEIRUT.

5. WHEN THE AMBASSADOR'S LETTER WAS DELIVERED
TO THE MINISTER OF HEALTH ON THE EVENING OF
SEPTEMBER 1, THE MINISTER INFORMED DR. NASSIB
HEMAIDAN, USAID GENERAL DEVELOPMENT OFFICER
(WHO DELIVERED THE LETTER), THAT DR. EL-YAFI,
MINISTRY DIRECTOR OF INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS, WOULD
LEAVE FOR BEIRUT THE MORNING OF SEPTEMBER 2 TO
SERVE AS SARG LIAISON OFFICER TO ARRANGE FOR
DELIVERY OF MEDICAL SUPPLIES.

6. HOWEVER, ON SEPTEMBER 2, DR. HEMAIDAN WAS TOLD
BY THE MINISTER OF HEALTH THAT DR. EL-YAFI'S TRIP
TO BEIRUT WAS POSTPONED BECAUSE THE PRIME MINISTER
MUST APPROVE ACCEPTANCE OF ALL ASSITANCE FROM
NATIONS OTHER THAN ARAB BROTHERS. ON THAT DAY

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THE PM WAS IN THE LATTAKIA AREA AND COULD NOT
BE REACHED. THAT SAME VENING, SEPTEMBER 2,
DR. HEMAIDAN WAS AKED BY DR. MUSTAPHA BAATH,
SENIOR VICE MINISTER OF HEALTH, TO COME TO HIS
OFFICE THE NEXT MORNING, SEPTEMBER 3.

7. WHEN DR. HEMAIDAN, WITH HIS SYRIAN ASSITANT,
CALLED ON VICE MINISTER BAATH, SOME OF THE FACTORS
(UNKNOWN TO US BEFORE) CONTRIBUTING TO THE DELAY IN
ACCEPTING THE U.S. ASSISTANCE BEGAN TO EMERGE.

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----------030208 091613Z /43
R 091327Z SEP 77
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
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INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY BEIRU
AMEMBASSY CAIRO

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 DAMASCUS 5752

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THE MEETING TURNED INTO A HARANGUE BY DR. BAATH AGAINST
HIS MINISTER (WHOM BAATH DESCRIBED AS "AN AMERICAN STOOGE")
AND ALL AMERICANS AND THEIR ATTITUDES. HE BLAMED THE USG
FOR THE CONTINUING ISRAELI OCCUPATION OF SYRIA'S GOLANHEIGHTS
AND OTHER ARAB TERRITORIES. THE HEALTH MINISTER WAS ACCUSED BY DR.
DR. BAATH OF HAVING ASKED
THE USG FOR ASSITANCE CONTRARY TO THE PM'S INSTRUCTION
SINCE "THE USA IS NOT A FRIENDLY COUNTRY." HE
ACCUED THE USG BOTH OF MISERLINESS BECAUSE OF THE MEAGER
AMOUNT OF THE AMBASSADOR'S AUTHORITY AND INTERFERENCE
IN SYRIAN INTERNAL AFFAIRS BECAUSE WE ASKED QUESTIONS
ABOUT SARG MEDICAL SUPPLIES AND EXPECTED
AVAILABILITIES FROM OTHER DONORS. HE CONSIDERED
SUCH QUESTIONING TO BE SPYING. HE ACCUSED US OF
ARROGANCE IN PROPOSING EXPERT ASSISTANCE OF U.S.
DOCOTRS FROM CDC ATLANTA. HE SAID THAT WHEN SYRIA

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WANTS EXPERT ASSISTANCE, IT WILL "ORDER" IT FROM
WHO SINCE SYRIA HAS SUCH A RIGHT BECAUSE IT IS A
MEMBER OF WHO.

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8. WHEN THE AMBASSADOR WAS BRIEFED ON THE MEETING
WITH DR. BAATH, HE DECIDED TO WAIT UNTIL SUNDAY
MORNING, SEPTEMBER 4, TO CONTACT THE MINISTRY OF
HEALTH RE A GO-AHEAD ON DELIVERY OF MEDICAL SUPPLIES,
AND IF THE MINISTRY HADN'T ACQUIRED APPROVAL TO
RECEIVE THE SUPPLIES BY THEN, THE AMBASSADOR WOULD
CONTACT THE FOREIGN MINISTRY TO FORCE A DECISION.
ON SUNDAY MORNING, THE VICE MINISTER OF HEALTH EVADED
THE ISSUE AND PASSED OUR INQUIRIES TO THE CHAIRMAN
OF THE SARG CHOLERA COMMITTEE WHO PROVED TO A"UNAVILABLE".
THE AMBASSADOR THEN CALLED ON THE DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER.

9. ONE DAY LATER, THE DEPUTY FOREING MINISTER INFORMED HE
AMBASSADOR (MONDAY AFTERNOON, SEPTEMBER 5)
THAT THE SYRIAN GOVERNMENT WOULD BE PLEASED TO ACCEPT
U.S. ASSISTANCE AND THAT SYRIAN CUSTOMS OFFICIALS HAD
BEEN INSTRUCTED TO ADMIT THE SUPPLIES FROM BEIRUT
INTO SYRIAN EXPEDITIOUSLY.

10. FROM THE POINT ONWARD, THINGS MOVED SMOOTHLY WITH
THE DELIVERY OF FOUR TRUCKLOADS OF MEDICAL SUPPLIES LATE
IN THE EVENINGS OF SEPTEMBER 6 AND 7. SARG CUSTOMS
AND HEALTHMINISTRY OFFICIALS WERE FULLY COOPERATIVE
AND EFFICIENT.

11. COMMENT:

THE VICE MINISTER OF HEALTH IS AN ACTIVE AN
PROMINENT MEMBER OF THE RULING BAATH PARTY. HIS HARANGUE
AGIANST THE USG WAS PROBABLY STIMULATED BY HIS PERSONAL
ANTIPATHY TOWARDS HIS MINISTR AND BY THE CRISIS ATMOSPHERE
PREVAILING IN THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH. HOWEVER, IT REPRE-
SENTS ATTITUDES WHICH ARE NOT RESTRICTED TO THAT OFFICIAL
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AND HIS IMMEDIATE COLLEAGUES AMONG SARG OFFICIALS. IN ANY
EVENT, THIS EPISODE SERVES AS A SHARP REMINDER OF THE
VOLATILITY OF THE SYRIAN SCENE. WE ARE WORKING WITH A
GOVERNMENT WHICH INCLUDES MANY OFFICIALS WHO HARBOR
STRONG ANIMOSITIES TOWARDS THE U.S., STEMMING FROM THEIR

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PERCEPTIONS OF USG POSITIONS IN THE ARAB-ISRAEL CONFRONTA-
TION. IN FACT, THE VICE MINISTER WAS QUITE ACCURATE WHEN
HE SAID THE U.S. IS NOT CONSIDERED A "FRIEND CONTRY."
THE BAATH RESERVES THIS CATEGORY FOR THIRD WORLD COUNTRIES
(AND NOT ALL OF THEM). WHEN THE AMBASSADOR LTER ASKED THE
DEPUTY FONMIN IN WHICH CATEGORY THE U.S. CURRENTLY FELL, HE
MILINGLY REPLIED, "THE ONE RESERVED FOR EVOLVING IMPERIALISTS."
MURPHY

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Message Attributes

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